



# NEWSLETTER

MONITORING THE FUTURE - NEWS UPDATE

DECEMBER 2019

## YOU CANNOT BE REPLACED!

You were scientifically selected to be included in the follow-up sample so that your responses represent the views of thousands of people your age. If we lose contact with you, no substitution can be made, and the views of adults similar to you will not be as well represented by this national study. The success of the study depends upon your willingness to continue to complete and return the questionnaire to Monitoring the Future. For this reason, we work hard to keep track of you and other participants around the country and the world. We are indeed grateful for your cooperation. Please know that your individual responses are kept completely confidential.

**YOUR NEXT  
SURVEY WILL BE  
ONLINE!**



## IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN

This newsletter contains results from the follow-up surveys that you completed for the Monitoring the Future study. It represents our commitment to sharing results of the study with our participants. We are also committed to distributing the information we gain from this study to policymakers and the public. Political leaders, influential organizations, and the general public have consistently shown their interest in the attitudes and actions of young adults, and Monitoring the future is an effective means of communicating your viewpoints and experiences to them.

The important study is designed to look at changing behaviors and preferences of young Americans. We believe that studying the way young adults are today will tell us a lot about the way the whole nation will be tomorrow.

This year's newsletter contains updates on some topics that you may have seen in previous newsletters, as well as some new topics.



Visit our  
website at:

[monitoringthefuture.org](http://monitoringthefuture.org)



Follow us on  
Twitter  
**@ysi\_news**



"Like"  
University of  
Michigan  
**Youth and Social  
Issues Program**  
on Facebook

**MONITORING THE FUTURE**  
IS FUNDED BY



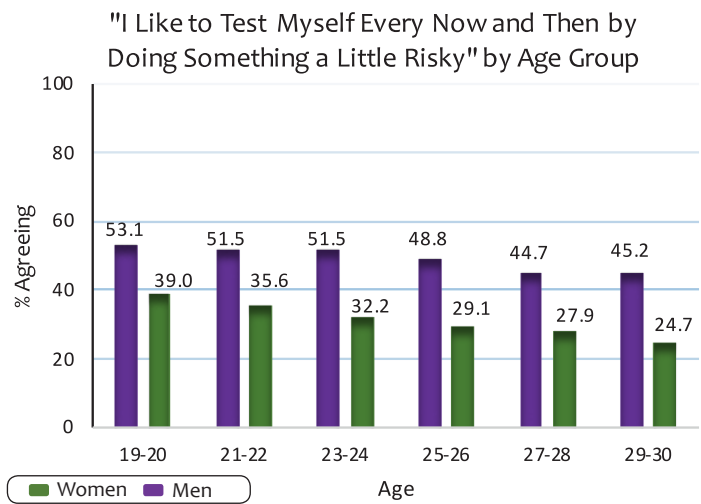
# Risk Taking in Adult Men and Women



Monitoring the Future data show that young men in their late teens and early 20s are more likely to engage in risk taking compared to older young adult men. To demonstrate this, we examined the responses to two questions on risk asked by us from 2000 to 2018 of participants aged 19-30 years old.

We asked participants (sample size was about 4,500 overall) whether or not they agreed with the statement, “I like to test myself every now and then by doing something a little risky.” Figure 1 shows this risk preference is consistently much higher for

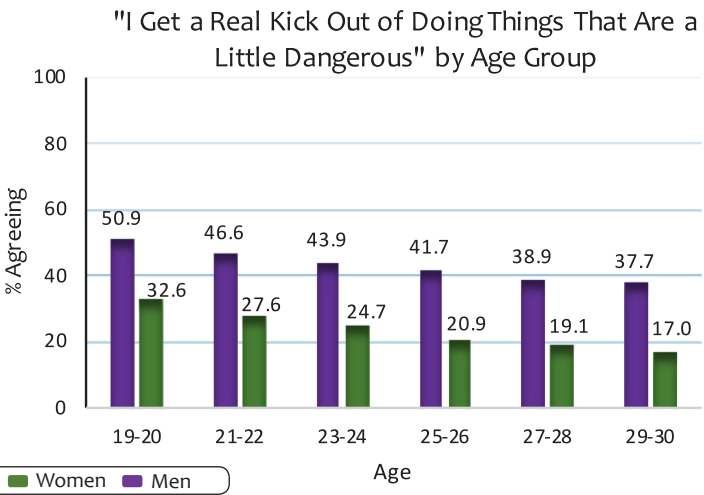
Figure 1



young men than young women across all ages, and decreases with age for both men and women. Risk preference is highest at age 19-20 for both men (53%) and women (39%), and then decreases by age

29-30 (45% and almost 25% respectively). A penchant for risky behavior decreases as we get older and as we have more things to lose—money, relationships, careers, etc.

Figure 2

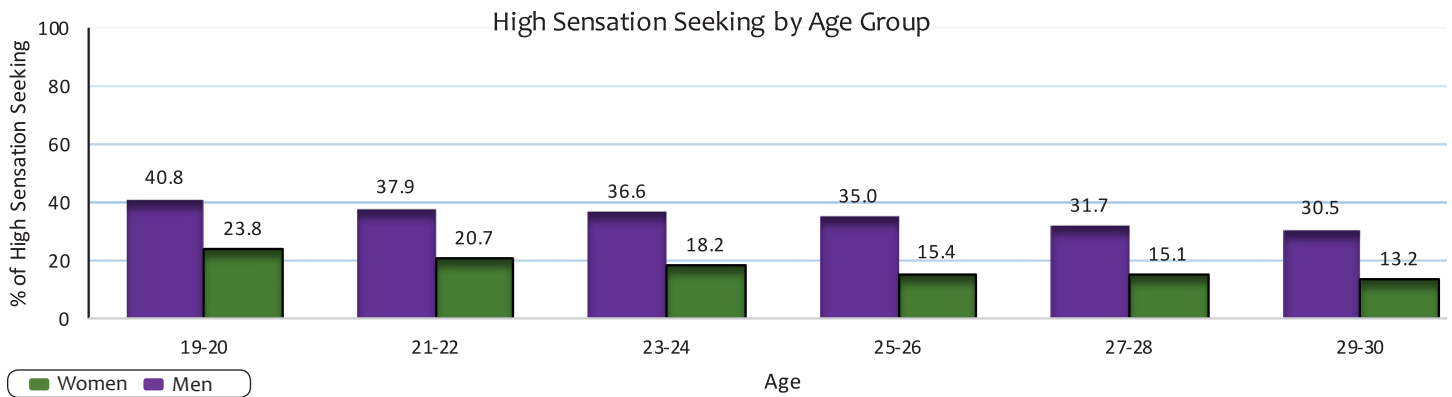


We also asked about the appeal of risk.

Participants responded to the statement, “I get a real kick out of doing things that are a little dangerous.” Again, young men are much more likely than young women at every age to enjoy some level of risk, and this enjoyment drops with age for both men and women. At age 19-20, almost 51% of men get a kick out of something a little dangerous compared to only 32% of women, and these percentages drop to 37% and 17%, respectively, by age 29-30.

Together, these two items get at a characteristic called sensation seeking. Sensation seeking is considered as a personality trait in which one seeks high sensations, typically through taking risks. Many of us are willing to spend money to experience the sensation and thrill of risk and some of us may even do it for a living. Some people are drawn to roller coasters for the adrenaline, some love the speed of driving fast, while some participate in extreme sports like rock climbing or skydiving. How many of these risk seekers are out there?

**Figure 3**



We measure this sensation seeking by combining the two Monitoring the Future items in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 3 reports the percentage of participants who scored as high sensation seekers (who reported a score of 5 on a scale of 1 to 5 on both items) from 2000 to 2018. We see a similar trend as before, where 40% of men age 19-20 scored high for sensation seeking while women of the same age, only 23% scored as high. As age increases, the percentage of high sensation seekers generally decreases; at each age, fewer women are considered high sensation seekers compared to men. As we get older we learn from our mistakes and we learn to manage our exposure to risk.

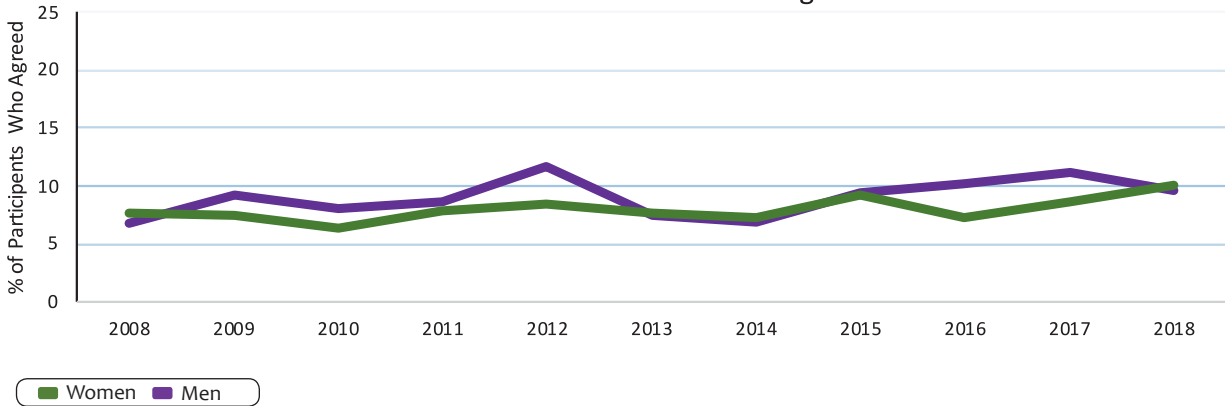
Of course, there is always the other end of the sensation seeking spectrum, a personality trait that may be just as impactful ... boredom.



## Boredom in Adult Men and Women

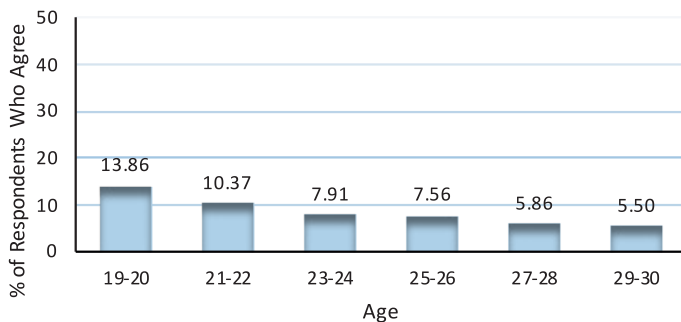
Boredom is often associated with adolescents. A lack of interest in school, little or no extracurricular activities, and thoughtless social media engagement create our perception of a bored teenager. But what about adults? Adults are no longer navigating the demands of high school. We also have greater control over the decisions we make in our lives and we are able to choose the activities we enjoy. Boredom, then, must not be all that common in adults, right? To answer this question, we look at Monitoring the Future data among 19-30 year olds from 2008 to 2018 (sample size was about 870 per year). We asked participants on a scale of 1 to 5 how much they agreed with the statement, “I am often bored.”

Figure 4 shows the percentage of respondents 19-30 years old who are considered highly bored (scoring a 5) based on their response to the boredom statement. As is shown, there is an overall trend of increased boredom across the decade from 2008 to 2018, with percentages indicating that they are highly bored increasing for women from almost 8% to 10% and for men from 6% to 9%. This trend is a little bumpy, but nonetheless, young adults seem more bored now than a decade ago, a trend we have also found with teens.

**Figure 4****"I Am Often Bored" from 2008 to 2018 for Age 19-30**

It is interesting to look at the results from a gender perspective. Figure 4 shows that there have not been consistent gender differences in high levels of boredom across the years. Thus, although boredom has been increasing for both women and men, gender does not appear to be a good predictor of boredom in adults.

What impact does age have on boredom in adults? We have seen that boredom is increasing in young adults, but in Figure 5 we see that as adults get older the proportion who are highly bored decreases. In recent years (2017-2018), the highest rates of boredom, almost 14%, were reported by respondents age 19-20. Boredom rates steadily decrease to 5.5% at age 29-30.

**Figure 5****"I Am Often Bored" by Age Group in 2017 and 2018**

These age effects are striking and suggest that as young people gain more independence and responsibility associated with adulthood, rates of boredom decrease.



Boredom presents itself differently in everyone. For some it is difficult to recognize when they are experiencing boredom and maybe even more difficult to recognize when boredom moves from simply channel surfing to something more serious. Common causes from the scientific literature include:

- Little to no recreational activity or interest
- Daily routines that cannot be changed
- Little mental stimulation
- Poor rest and nutrition

A certain level of boredom in adults is a common human experience, and can be functional in terms of motivating attention and activity. But little is known about problematic levels and reasons for boredom. We hope now you might reflect on what interests you have, what routines you might find yourself in, and what level of boredom you might experience in your life.

***We thank you again for being part of the Monitoring the Future study!***